

# Forced-Unionism Abuses Exposed

The facts Big Labor bosses would rather you didn't hear about.

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*Compulsory unionism breeds corruption. In each issue of "Exposed," the National Right to Work Committee will highlight yet another example of union-boss abuse spawned and perpetuated by Big Labor's government-granted privilege to force workers to pay union dues, or be fired.*

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## **Teacher Union Lawyer's Threat Silenced Florida Parents in 2000, Helped Keep Alleged Abuser in the Classroom For Four More Years**

As Florida schoolchildren went on break to celebrate Thanksgiving this year, they and their parents were still trying to digest the shocking allegations about Seminole County special education teacher Kathleen Garrett.

Ms. Garrett was arrested November 10 on nine counts of child abuse. Police charge that the 48-year-old middle school teacher beat and humiliated students, sat on some, knocked one child's teeth out when she slammed his head on a desk and pushed another's face into vomit.

Florida media began publishing detailed articles in mid-November showing that schoolchildren, parents, and teaching aides had been reporting to school officials about Ms. Garrett's violent and irrational actions in the classroom at least since 1999. Floridians justifiably began to wonder how she had remained on the job for so long.

Then Carol Goings of Casselberry, Fla., the mother of a mentally handicapped daughter and two other children, came forward with a threatening letter she and her husband had received in March 2000 from the general counsel for the Florida affiliate of the National Education Association (NEA) teacher union.

Mrs. Goings had gone to school officials when her daughter Melody, now 17, told her that Ms. Garrett had struck her on the head. During the 1999-2000 school year, several other parents of Ms. Garrett's students also asked that their children be removed from Ms. Garrett's class.

One parent charged that Ms. Garrett had hit her son with a ruler until his head was bloody. A seventh-grade peer tutor informed school officials that he had witnessed her punish a handicapped student for crossing the room without her permission by grabbing him by the neck and throwing him into a closed closet door.

For unexplained reasons, school officials dismissed all complaints made against Ms. Garrett in 1999 and 2000. However, Melody Goings and several other students were allowed to transfer into another class, and Ms. Garrett was ultimately transferred out of Indian Trails Middle School to South Seminole Middle for the following school year.

Relieved that their own daughter was safe, but alarmed that other children were still in danger, Mr. and Mrs. Goings continued to fight for the dismissal of Ms. Garrett -- until teacher union lawyer Pamela Cooper muzzled them.

In her acid-penned letter to the Goings, Ms. Cooper berated them for the fact that “several other students have been withdrawn from [Ms. Garrett’s] class as a result of your efforts to impugn her professional performance.”

“In my view,” wrote Ms. Cooper, “your remarks and your continuing efforts to undermine Ms. Garrett’s professional reputation go beyond lawful fair comment and are malicious and actionable. . . . [I]n the event that you continue to impugn the reputation of this fine teacher, it will be necessary for us to consider formal legal action against you and pursue whatever damages are available to Ms. Garrett.

“PLEASE GOVERN YOURSELF ACCORDINGLY.” (Emphasis in original.)

The teacher union lawyer’s intimidation tactic worked. Mrs. Goings decided to stop contacting other parents and school officials. “I was petrified,” she recently explained. “We’re a young family struggling to raise three kids on my husband’s salary.”

As the *Orlando Sentinel* editorialized November 22, if teacher union bosses “hadn’t stepped in -- and the School Board had paid more attention to the parents -- the case against Ms. Garrett might have been resolved earlier. Instead, investigators are probing whether dozens of Seminole’s handicapped students were subjected to continuing physical abuse.”

Florida teacher union bosses continue even today to defend their successful bid to muzzle Carol and Howard Goings, claiming they acted in “good faith.”

Union chieftains’ remarkable unwillingness to admit error now in the Garrett matter strengthens the already powerful case that they do not deserve the monopoly power, under Florida law, to bargain over the pay, benefits, and job conditions of public school teachers, even teachers who choose not to join the union.

For years, National Right to Work Committee members and other opponents of forced unionism have argued that state laws granting teacher union officials monopoly-bargaining power over educational employees reward incompetent and abusive teachers and punish the vast majority who are competent and conscientious. The Garrett case shows how this is truer than even many Right to Work supporters realized. It’s time to bust up the teacher union monopoly.

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